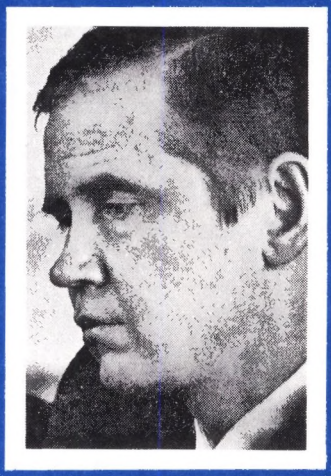
PERESTROIKA

Through the Eyes of a People's Deputy



Sergei STANKEVICH

—A YOUNG HISTORIAN TURNED PROFESSIONAL POLITICIAN, AN ENERGETIC PARLIAMENTARIAN WITH A MODERN WORLD OUTLOOK

PERESTROIKA

Through the Eyes of a People's Deputy

Sergei
STANKEVICH

"Today we are on the threshold of a great change in our life, one that will be as radical as that which occurred in 1985. But it was expected that the decisions taken in April 1985 would be popular, the people's absolute support was counted on, whereas now we have reached a stage when urgent measures have to be adopted that will be basically unpopular and for which there will be no immediate mass support. We badly need to make decisions that will affect the destinies, interests and lives of hundreds of thousands, perhaps even millions of people. But first, after an honest discussion on what has to be done, we must obtain the people's consent."

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Сергей Борисович СТАНКЕВИЧ

ПЕРЕСТРОЙКА ГЛАЗАМИ НАРОДНОГО ДЕПУТАТА

на английском языке

Цена 25 к.

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Translated from the Russian by Natalia Shevyrina

POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY

"Sergei said 'nay' again!" Mikhail Gorbachev observed out loud at one of the sessions of the USSR Congress of People's Deputies. Repeating this phrase has become a sort of joke among my constituency and journalists. But it's true, Gorbachev really did say that. The thing was that my seat during the Congress was in the middle of the sixth row, right in front of Gorbachev's place on the platform. I was always before Gorbachev's eyes, and, naturally, he could not help noticing my lonely hand raised after the chairman would say: "Who is against?"

Indeed, I voted against a whole number of issues, both on procedural ones and matters of substance. For instance, I was against Nikolai Ryzhkov's appointment as head of the cabinet, as well as of Anatoli Lukyanov's as Vice-President of the USSR Supreme Soviet. I knew perfectly well that I would be outvoted. Moreover, I had nothing seriously against either candidate, but I felt it was more important at that point to create a parliamentary precedent.

Why? To make candidates running for top state posts understand that the country's precarious situation was not something that had happened by chance, and that it should not be regarded as such. The entire responsibility for the crisis has to be borne by those who have been in

the leadership for the last few years, even though they inherited it from the former government, and that its causes can be traced to a whole number of other objective reasons. Still, power implies responsibility, regardless of objective circumstances. I thought it was essential to make this clear from the very beginning of the Congress.

As for Ryzhkov and Lukyanov personally, they are, no doubt, highly efficient people with a profound insight into our problems, and with their own outlook on things. Both take their duties very seriously, though they are both also a bit too conventional. No wonder both have paid tribute to the ritual and highflown rhetoric of former years. This can be seen, for example, from the final part of Lukyanov's policy statement. I mean, the place where he dwelt upon the role of the Party in the present situation. His approach was abolutely non-critical and rather unrealistic, and I found this quite disturbing.

So, again, when I was voting my primary consideration was to make it clear to the top statesmen of this country that as long as the nation was going through a crisis, they would be held responsible for it, and that as long as we were looking for a way out, there would always be MPs who would demand that the leaders take personal responsibility and would even vote against them. The main slogan of my election campaign was "Democracy should work", and my saying "nay" was the first step towards carrying it out.

MAN AND POLITICS

I did not enter politics by chance. I hold a degree in history, and I'm an expert on foreign parliaments, especially the US Congress, on relations between MPs and their constituencies, and collective political actions. I am the author of twenty-odd papers, a book on the United States' political history, and a thesis on the same subject.

Naturally, all my studies of other countries' experience enabled me to make comparisons, to look for parallels in the developments taking place in my own country. I could not help wondering why the USSR Supreme Soviet was,

in fact, a rubber stamp used by bureaucracy on various laws compiled and presented by anonymous persons (mind you, this stamp was meticulously applied to any legal act, no matter how strange or detrimental it sounded). I also kept asking myself why our elections were in reality nothing more than a parody of an act of the people's volition.

I knew I could propose alternatives not based on blind imitation of foreign experience but taking into consideration all the clear gains of human civilization that had been tested over centuries. I had materials, suggestions, and ideas stored away in a desk drawer for years, waiting for better times—an attitude typical of many intellectuals in the era of stagnation.

As soon as even a glimmer of an opportunity to put my ideas into practice presented itself, I plunged into action.

Such an opportunity was opened by the plenary meeting of the CPSU Central Committee which launched perestroika in April 1985. Perestroika was our only hope to try things out in practice. Otherwise our ideas would have remained purely academic. It would have been a classic case of liberal intellectuals opposing themselves to the powers-that-be, manifesting itself in press publications from which our shrewd public, used to reading between the lines, would have been able to draw subtle conclusions based on hints, conclusions which would make that public gasp despite their complete innocence. It would have been a sure way to popularity, would have even given us the reputation of being "staunch revolutionaries" in some elitist circles. But all that would have had very little to do with reality and the nation's true cares and concerns.

It was perestroika that opened new horizons to us. Political life in the country became more active, or, rather, we were given our first chance to act. The first products of perestroika, independent movements, sprang up like mushrooms, and Moscow's famous Pushkin Square, its "Hyde Park", began to thrive. Those were the days of rally democracy, its "honeymoon", so to speak. The square would be swarming with people even after midnight: they stayed till their legs and voices failed them. Heated debates, unrestricted and uncensored could be observed, debates on our country's past, present and future. They brought to the fore many people who would later play a

significant part in Moscow's emerging independent, non-official movements.

I was one of those who became involved in all that: specifically, I was one of the founders of the Moscow Popular Front in May-June 1988. It was an attempt to set up a broad coalition of various political clubs and groups that had emerged earlier. The coalition comprised environmentalists and consumer rights groups; groups seeking to protect the population from the arbitrary actions of the bureaucratic machine; intellectuals' clubs, such as one called Democratic Perestroika, which primarily concerned itself with the discussion and development of the theoretical foundations of social reforms; and many others.

All of them had one thing in common: they were all seeking to bring about democratic reform and radical change. All of them were equally interested in the appearance of laws authorizing new voluntary unions of citizens, laying the legal foundations for their activity; declaring freedom of the press; establishing democratic elections and vesting power in the Soviets of People's Deputies everywhere in the country. All groups, regardless of their convictions, agreed upon those points which enabled them to set up a coalition. Thus it was that the Moscow Popular Front came into existence.

This movement had its ups and downs. The former were the periods of lively public debates, which served to exacerbate and clarify some of the country's inner antagonisms; the latter inevitably followed the former.

The campaign preceding the elections of USSR People's Deputies (late 1988-early 1989) pushed this movement towards qualitative changes. The Moscow Popular Front took part in the election campaign in order to gain new political experience. The campaign showed that the Front was a real political force. Actually, none of the participants in the election campaign had any experience—neither the independent political movements like our Front, nor the bloc of bureaucratic forces. It was obvious that those who gained the necessary experience faster than others were bound to win. The Front proved to be able to learn fast, see new opportunities, put forward ideas and implement them.

That was why it could boast certain achievements. The elections were a touchstone of our political maturity. What

was especially important was that a whole number of candidates backed by the Moscow Popular Front became People's Deputies. Now we were directly involved with the legislative bodies, and could purposefully work amongst the population, using our Deputy mandates as an effective political means of changing the situation in the country.

This is the sphere in which people with political abilities should come to the fore, new people, and I am said to be one of them. Actually, that was how I became a politician: I began with theoretical studies, then got involved in a political movement and eventually was elected to the legislature, which gave me a new social status and quickly turned me into a professional MP.

A NEW TYPE OF POLITICIAN

It's a little embarrassing for me every time the subject of a new type of politician is discussed in my presence, for my ideas and definitions of the qualities essential for such a person might make me seem a bit immodest. Still, it would be wrong to ignore this issue.

To begin with, I think that such people must have a much higher level of general and political culture than those who came from the old "pack of cards" that were endlessly "reshuffled" in the past. Today's politicians must be very well educated. Actually, I'm convinced that a good liberal arts background is essential, regardless of the level of scientific training.

Such a person must have a special combination of features: on the one hand, he must be actively humane and both empathetic and sympathetic as regards people's problems. On the other hand, he must be able to control his emotions and keep himself from getting overly involved in other people's affairs. Another essential quality is an ability to keep things in perspective and disregard one's own interests. I know it is hard to do so, but it is absolutely vital for a politician.

It is equally essential to avoid stereotypes in one's outlook on politics, i.e., not to regard it as the notorious procedure of "choosing, educating, and appointing peo-

ple", but as a process of revealing and reconciling real, objectively existing interests. The task is to reveal these interests, define them, settle possible conflicts and reach a sensible compromise.

Sticking consistently to democracy is just as vital. Indeed, it is often tempting to resort to authoritarian measures because it is simpler! You're convinced your idea is best, and rather than spending three, four, five or even seven days trying to persuade those who are against it, the idea of issuing an order, of speeding up the decision for the "common good", ignoring democracy completely can seem mighty attractive. But again I say that temptation must be ignored and instead a politician must marshall his inner forces and try to convince others, even if it takes more time. In this case the consolidating effect of his principal idea will be stronger, for the support for it will not be the result of fear or coercion, but will be based on the certainty that it is correct.

Naturally, such a politician must be open to new ideas and be absolutely free of dogmas and stereotypes. It has to be kept in mind that your idea, as intelligent and sagacious as it may be, and no matter how long you may have been developing it, may have to be forgotten in a moment if someone else suggests something much more efficient. You have to be able to perceive a new idea and be ready to accept unconventional proposals, even those put forward by your opponents. Even if you are very strongly against those opponents, you have to be willing and able to consider any reasonable suggestions they might make. That is a real politician.

One should also be receptive to international experience, which is something we definitely lack today. In fact, this is our old disease. What's going on in other parts of the world is, at best, nothing more than an exotic object of our admiration. Certain people regard any deliberate attempt to make use of foreign experience as a manifestation of some mythical enemy plot. They begin to wonder what this enemy is up to and decide that, as usual, it is up to no good.

This attitude is typical of the Stalinist outlook, according to which anyone who has been abroad and studied "capitalist" experience is an enemy agent who has not been put up against the wall only out of negligence or a lack of vigilance.

I speak from personal experience. Some time ago I visited the United States within the framework of an academic agreement on an exchange of scientists for purely scientific purposes. While I was there I also met with a personal acquaintance of mine, US Senator Bill Bradley. He invited me to spend a day with him in Washington, visit his office, watch politics in the making, go on a tour of the US Congress, and see all its floors and corners to really get an impression of the US legislative process.

I came to the American capital, spent the day most productively and saw as much as I could. Naturally, I was interviewed by local reporters. TASS picked up on some of those interviews and translated them, and *Izvestia* carried a few selections. That was what triggered it all. Several Soviet papers published replies from our homegrown dogmatists. "People's Deputy Stankevich's visit to the United States was obviously designed to get advice on how to behave here, at rallies and at the Congress, and now he's demonstrating what he has learned. The question needs to be asked: Who is he working for? But no matter what he might undertake, we are sure which way we are going, and no one will be able to divert us from it."

Foreign experience still has the effect of a red rag on many people here. Such is the paradox of Stalinist mentality, and we can see manifestations of this quite frequently.

Fortunately, many of those who took part in the Congress of People's Deputies do not share this obscure outlook on current developments in the Soviet Union. Quite a few Deputies possess the qualities of the new type of politician I have described above. It is my fervent hope that they won't get lost in the crowd or be devoured by the administrative system, but will grow in number.

Of course, I'm not saying that they are up to the ideal, nobody, after all, is perfect. All of us are human, with our own weaknesses and shortcomings. But some of the partcipants in the Congress and the present MPs have already manifested the basic features of the "new politicians". Unfortunately, their numbers in the USSR Supreme Soviet are not as great as they should be: in my opinion the present composition of the Soviet Parliament is less democratic than that of the entire Congress of People's Deputies.

Where can such new politicians come from? Various sources, I think, for instance, from all kinds of non-official, voluntary associations and groupings, where new political culture is often being created. I can vouch for this, because I have seen how rapidly their members are developing.

Until recently I taught at Moscow's Lenin Teachers Training Institute. My students were joining various independent political clubs in their very first year there. Now many of them have emerged as mature politicians, though they're just beginning their professional careers. When they started, they were mere boys, but they developed into acknowledged leaders, speakers and organizers very rapidly. Why? Because of their daily involvement in politics. This is what is so important about independent political organizations, and they should be formed if only to help the masses master the basic skills of collective political actions and political leadership. And actually such groupings have an even more important role to play.

I don't mean to say that new politicians come from non-official movements alone. Our present life is so diversified that such people are emerging from all kinds of situations in which they are able to reveal their abilities. For instance, at the Congress of People's Deputies I came across some servicemen who were radically different from my idea of what someone in the Army was like. I met two amazing officers, Colonel Martirosyan and Lieutenant-Colonel Podziruk. I still find it amazing that they managed to remain so democratic and socially active, and so keen on democratic reform in the Army. For as far as I know, the Army is based on strict subordination and a rigid hierarchy. But the two officers managed to develop into the new type of a politician even within such a system. The recent actions undertaken by workers, particularly the miners' strikes at Kuzbass, Donbass and other mining areas, have also brought forward quite a number of new politicians.

And then there are some among Party workers whom it would be unfair to ignore. Take Nikolai Sazonov, Party committee secretary of a major plant in Naberezhnye Chelny: he won the elections after a hard-fought campaign against local Party and city council functionaries. He really is a politician of a new kind. There are quite a few true leaders among the CPSU members, even though

the Party itself is going through a crisis. The paradox is that the CPSU today is not homogeneous: the differences between the views of many of its members are greater than those, say, between the Democratic and Republican parties in the US.

CHOICE OF THE WAY

Perestroika is a complex phenomenon, but I would like to emphasize its most essential feature—its rejection of the many absurdities that have permeated our society, and a breakthrough to common sense, a transition from the cult of directives to the cult of initiative. To use a purely political science term, I would define perestroika as a restructuring of a system. Let me explain what I mean.

I have studied other examples of such restructurings from the history of this and other countries in the world. It is always a period of active reforms that affect and alter the basic, essential features of the system.

Such reorganizations were carried out in the 1930s both in the United States and in the Soviet Union (though, naturally, they differed in essence). One also took place in Russia back in the 1860s-70s (Alexander II's reforms).

The question with reference to perestroika is to what extent we have learned the lessons of history. This, I am sorry to say, is something we have a great deal of difficulty doing. Until recently we were unable to learn from our own history or that of other countries. I have to say that this feature of ours seems to be quite unique, but I hope that now we can break away from this bad tradition, from our past, with the help of perestroika.

Radical changes similar to perestroika have been taking place in other countries as well, for instance, in Poland, Hungary and China. It is quite possible that the process of perestroika, as it goes on to expand, will involve other nations. What is vital is to forget nothing, to learn as we go along and pay attention to what is happening in other countries of the world, both near and far.

For instance, the situation in Poland is very similar to ours. As for Hungary, its population's living standards are

higher than those here in the Soviet Union, which means that accelerated modernization is quite feasible there if the people are willing to restrict their demands and tighten their belts somewhat. They can afford to lower their living standards a little bit and still have them be socially bearable. As for us, or Poland, we can't afford it—our living standards are as low as they can be. That is why our country is inclined to consider the tempting option for what's being called authoritarian modernization, that is, suppressing democracy, reducing it to a minimum, taking a firm hold of the nation and forcing it to accept all the negative consequences of intensive structural change, that is, putting up with it without any outbursts.

Such an option was theoretically possible, but we have already missed the chance to use it. We had that chance back in 1983, and it even seemed to me that Yuri Andropov, who had just been elected General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, had chosen that way—everything pointed to it. He started with the famous measures aimed at enforcing order and discipline and eradicating corruption. All those measures were carried out by authoritarian methods, without any publicity as regards the government's actions.

That was a historic chance, but Andropov's death and Konstantin Chernenko's appointment as General Secretary marked the beginning of a conservative retreat, which only exacerbated our society's diseases.

Then came Mikhail Gorbachev, but he could not accomplish what Andropov had started: he needed a certain period of time to consolidate his position, to win confidence and popularity, to get a hold of and tighten his grasp of the levers of power; i.e, all those things that Andropov already had when he started out. It took Gorbachev several years to accomplish this, and meanwhile the chance of authoritarian reform had passed.

Here we face an interesting paradox. To concentrate the necessary power in his hands, Gorbachev had to launch the policy of glasnost—it was his trump card which enabled him to quickly move forward and thus win over the nation. In making use of this, he sacrificed the possibility of authoritarian reform the way a chess player sacrifices his queen.

It is impossible to go back from our present level of openness, democratization and unprecedented freedom

for our social and political forces to an authoritarian regime and reforms along the lines of Peter the Great. Gorbachev's and our own choice is predetermined. In my opinion, we can follow only one way—that of liberal democratic reform.

But we still hear voices calling for the authoritarian way of perestroika, on the grounds that this would eliminate the danger posed by the so-called "excesses of perestroika", that is, the potential conflicts perestroika is otherwise fraught with. As for me, I find these appeals groundless, and I will tell you why.

After a few years of glasnost, limited as it has been, after reading and discussing a lot of materials and observing the radical transformation of the public mentality, I can say that our society has quite obviously changed beyond recognition. It is no longer possible to say to the people: "We've had enough of playing at democracy and more than enough of glasnost—we'll cancel both!" I am convinced that that cannot be done today. It is impossible to impose an authoritarian regime on the nation without violence, to cancel glasnost, shut up the critics and curb the media. Indeed, how can the people who launched perestroika and said so many noble words about the role of democracy as the leading force of reform and creative activity of the masses expect to be respected or believed ever again if they resort to authoritarian measures? The only result would be the people's complete alienation from perestroika. That is why any return to totalitarian rule would be possible only if we completely reversed our course and denounced all the goals that were declared not so long ago.

No, if we want to continue and promote perestroika, there is only one path we can follow, the democratic one—I am absolutely convinced of that.

This is the hardest way, demanding a high level of sensitivity from our leaders and forcing them to search for solutions to seemingly unsolvable conflicts, conflicts that have been exacerbated by perestroika. So as not to lose everything in this process, we must make yet another choice as well. We must decide not to stop half-way or to swing like a pendulum back and forth from the liberal-democratic version to authoritarianism. Having said "A", we have to go on and recite the rest of the alphabet.

Perestroika must be a revolution as regards goals and

an evolution of ways and means. Or, rather, its ways and means must be mostly evolutionary, though in some cases revolutionary measures can also be used, which cannot be completely rejected.

The choice of the ways and means is a very serious matter, and must be absolutely precise. Here is an example: perestroika is following a purely evolutionary course, but sometimes it is essential to make a direct appeal to the masses and to dramatize a certain situation. For instance, in the midst of a flare-up of an inter-ethnic conflict a dramatic appeal by the country's leader to the people in the trouble spot could often be vital. One must be prepared to use such methods.

Let us consider the events in Tbilisi in April 1989. An outburst of public protest in a violent form, hunger strikes and a demonstration on the steps of the Government House, a rally lasting for many days, and radical demands were a source of great concern for everyone. Under the circumstances a true leader should have revealed his revolutionary abilities and resorted to active political tactics. Imagine him appearing before the crowd, speaking authoritatively, and even plunging into a heated debate with the people, defeating their arguments with his own and trying to find a mutually acceptable way out. As we all know, what actually happened was something quite different: the rally was dispersed by troops and people were killed. Leaders of the republic (and perhaps of the country as well) showed their fatal inability to take practical political measures. It is always in turbulent situations that leaders' inability to conduct a dialogue and their fear of their own people become especially obvious.

Here we encounter one more problem, that of the personnel that are still with us from the old regime. Most of the key posts in the country are occupied by people who are old both literally and figuratively. They either bear personal responsibility for the past or, if they are too new to be held responsible, have an outlook which is the mirror reflection of their predecessors'.

I'm in no way saying that all we have to do to change the existing system is replace those functionaries with new ones. That is an extremely primitive idea and won't work. What we have to do is both change the system and replace people where necessary. Indeed, if we change only one or the other, nothing will come out of it. If we just

replace the people, the old system will digest the newcomers. And if only the system is changed and the reform is entrusted to old-timers, they will manage to adjust the new structure to their own needs. They will imitate reform, set up democratic facades, choose obedient subordinates and establish an order which will resemble democratic change but, in fact, will be a mockery of reform.

ANTI-PERESTROIKA

In my opinion, the process of perestroika is marking time because of a fairly strong bloc of anti-perestroika forces. It is not the only reason, but it is quite an influential factor.

The bloc of opponents to radical reform comprises all sorts of people. There definitely exists a large stratum of people who know exactly what they are going to lose and what they must do to defend themselves. They realize that their social group, that of bureaucratic distributors, will inevitably lose its positions and, therefore, be jettisoned as soon as perestroika goes beyond a certain point.

Indeed, they can exist only as long as they are in charge of "choosing, educating and appointing personnel". This is the classic formula which is like music to the ears of its representatives—choosing, educating and appointing personnel! Only with it can they distribute material resources, awards and all other kinds of remuneration; can they endow with or deprive someone of power, do charity, punish or pardon. This stratum will prosper only while it preserves its "guiding and directing role", regardless of the results of their use of power; only as long as they can enjoy it and never be held accountable for what they have done.

Bureaucrats by profession or by calling, they fully realize that it is the existing political system that creates such favourable, unique conditions for them; and that they can continue to exist only thanks to certain ideological dogmas embodied in the existing social institutions and relations. Thus they realize that they must not only

defend the institutions, but also the dogmas, symbols and fetishes.

Mind you, they themselves do not believe in the dogmas they have been preaching for years. They have a fairly cynical opinion of their own "sermons" and even mock them (but only among friends!), even crack jokes about the idols they have been praising in public. When out of the public view. they may even profane many things they allegedly hold sacred. Still, they know very well that their stratum's self-preservation and ability to control society's life depends entirely on brainwashing the masses every day and preserving the old ideological symbols, dogmas and institutions. They are determined, mortal enemies of perestroika.

Then there is another group made up of people who view perestroika mainly as something which is devaluing their personal and collective experience and contribution to the country's development. Imagine how they must feel when, knowing that they are nearing the end of their lives, and after having endured unbearable suffering and trials, often sacrificing the lives of their nearest and dearest, somebody suddenly says that it was all for nothing. Some people are laughing at what they used to repeat like a prayer and are casting down their idols which they used to worship fanatically. These people are trying to build what is to them a completely alien and fantastic society, contradicting everything they used to believe.

This group is dead certain that everything in the past was perfect—the ideas, ideals and plans. It's just that some of the leaders were wrong. This group regards even an attempt to doubt a strategic plan as an enemy provocation. To them, all that needs to be done is to restore the plan of building Communism in its initial purity, to get rid of the distortions caused by inefficient leaders, and continue moving forward.

At the same time, they admit that there are certain grounds for criticism, but they say that this is being used by certain dark forces, conspirators in a plot to ruin the ideal plan under the guise of correcting mistakes. They believe that some surviving enemies are "demagogically playing on the existing difficulties". It's another wonderful formula, another note in the system's musical score.

Actually, it's a great way to avoid answering awkward questions, dismissing them with a single word: "Demago-

gy". The same technique can be used when asking questions that end up eliciting answers whose logic is damning, containing arguments one cannot defeat. "Demagogy" is a unique word, enabling one to avoid answering yet at the same time to react to any turn in the discussion. It is absolutely amazing how quickly some ideologists have learned how to use this word, and it is the second group of perestroika's opponents who use it especially broadly. They put up with criticism within a very narrow framework, and as soon as that limit is exceeded, out comes the label—demagogue.

There are other groups against perestroika as well, mostly people who deny any possibility of sensible, consistent change. They are all for a specific type of "lumpen" perestroika, or another wave of expropriation aimed at dividing everything equally among the people.

POPULISM

The thing is that there are many interests in our society which are not specific to any particular social group. This creates a fertile medium for what politicians term populism. We have entered the era of populism, and we must be fully aware of that.

Populism is, in fact, a semi-conscious protest by the masses. The wave of populism sucks in everyone regardless of their class, regardless of their specific economic group interests— workers, intellectuals or farmers. It is a mass protest against bureaucracy, corruption in the upper echelons, elitist privileges, the domination of anti-democratic forces, and man's alienation from culture, education and government administration. This protest is emotional and impulsive.

The populist movements springing up today are swinging like a pendulum, from right to left. They are not satisfied with radical actions and liberal-democratic demands, if they have exhausted their credit of trust. Some time after the election of the new Soviet parliament it became clear to many that it would work no miracles. It was the right time for some groupings to demand something quite

the opposite—an iron hand, rigid order enforced by harsh measures, etc.

What is typical of the bulk of populists is a demand for primitive levelling and a distorted social version of social justice, and a desire to have their guaranteed minimum and a leader who would provide it tomorrow or the day after tomorrow.

Like a magnet, this powerful social drive attracts people who are susceptible to its allure. Naturally, attempts have been made to openly play on the populist moods. But such movements are consciously used by various political forces for different, often mutually exclusive purposes.

The yearning for an iron hand which is characteristic of the right-wing populists is used by many bankrupt bureaucrats and functionaries. For instance, the Leningrad Party bosses, whose candidacies in the previous elections were a complete fiasco, are encouraging the workers' right-wing populist demands and nostalgic memories of an iron hand and rigid order. They oppose the concept of *democracy* to that of *discipline*. They say: yes, we stand for democracy, but there must also be discipline and order (as they understand it, of course). By opposing democracy to discipline they seek to encourage a significant part of the working class to suppress democratic tendencies. That was why they created the United Workers' Front.

THE WORKING CLASS

Why do the opponents of perestroika try to use workers in their own interests? I think that, under the circumstances, they are the main carriers of populist thinking, even though they are not alone. This is what I find paradoxical: the state and the Party seemed to be always busy developing political consciousness in "the most progressive class", but with no positive results. Certain groups of Party functionaries were allegedly in charge of the political education of this class. In fact, there was no education—there was mass propaganda of primitive ideological dogmas garnished with open flattery towards

the working class. The workers were told that they were the leading force of our society, the masters of the country, and the most progressive, best-organized and revolutionary class, and that the CPSU was the ruling party, their party, the party of the working class. Working-class ideology was said to be the leading one in society, and it was assumed that all other classes and social strata would sooner or later merge on the basis of this ideology.

That was social flattery not supported with any adequate policy. Backing up this theory were numerous public displays. In fact, there was a whole group of tame, decorative workers whose function was to adorn the presidiums of various conferences, forums, and congresses on all levels. Those were the people who had been tested in action, who clearly would willingly make any speech prepared by others if a special "instructor" rehearsed it with them, a procedure called "coaching the speaker". Those very workers, decorated with a whole slew of appropriate state honours, who sat in presidiums, made the required speeches and were elected to all bodies of authority, including the CPSU Central Committee, for the same ornamental purposes, were expected to personify the allegedly leading role of the working class.

In fact, the working class did not play any exclusive part in society. We knew it before, and now it is being openly talked about. There were many reasons why it could not play such a part, for instance, because of its economic status. It now has become common knowledge (not so long ago it was known only to experts) that the level of exploitation in our country is in many respects much higher than in other countries. For instance, here the share of wages in the gross national product, that is, the part of the product which the worker receives as the direct producer, is much lower than in many capitalist countries.

This economic situation makes the workers' social status rather specific. Furthermore, their actual contribution to society's management is extremely insignificant, for until recently the workers and their councils were in fact, I am sorry to say, totally without rights. Now they are trying to be more active, though so far with virtually no success.

As for the trade unions, whose natural function should be to protect the interests of workers, they were engaged

in some fictitious activities, the scale of which was terrifying. Suffice it to say that the unions had become an appendix of the state, bodies servicing the administration. Today this fact is clear to everyone. The unions do not perform the function they were set up to perform. Their huge bureaucratic machine spends the lion's share of membership fees and other funds entirely on its own needs.

It also has to be said that we have no genuine labour movement. Even the few attempts to set up free trade unions, which were easily cut short, were undertaken by intellectuals rather than workers. Unfortunately, those attempts did not succeed in drawing the masses' attention.

Now we can say objectively that the working class has never had the social status ascribed to it. I had to dwell on this because it is still claimed that it plays an exclusive part in perestroika. It is being brainwashed on a growing scale, and attempts are being made to turn it against intellectuals.

The line that workers are being told to believe is that a pitiful handful of intellectuals want all kinds of freedoms to write anything that comes into their heads. To this end, they are distracting young people from productive work and creating chaos in society. This line says that all that has to be done to ensure a good life for workers is to replace bad, corrupt bosses and establish order and discipline.

This, in fact, is an attempt merely to patch up society rather than renovating it from top to bottom. Moreover, any supporters of truly radical reform directly concerning state power, the sanctum of the system, are labelled as opportunistic, unprincipled and power-hungry politicians.

And now a great deal depends on our ability to revive the workers' independent political activity and organized labour movement.

In the summer of 1989 the Soviet Union was swept by a wave of miners' strikes, which came like a bolt out of the blue, a harbinger of a significant worsening of social conflicts that we are seeing today. The conflicts grow more serious because the crisis through which the country is going cannot yet be resolved. At the same time, the strikes also indicated the revival of the traditions of a genuine labour movement, independent of any administrative "conductors". The strikes were led by newly-emerged

strike committees which showed an amazing organizational talent and proved to be surprisingly (at least, to me) well prepared for political leadership.

Indeed, at a certain stage the tradition of this movement had been lost. But now in many cases workers are going on strike spontaneously. I saw this with my own eyes when I visited the Donbass coalfield and met with the local miners and strike committee members. I am glad to say that we easily found a common language, although it had been claimed by some participants at the Congress of People's Deputies that an "academic" could not defend the workers' interests.

I went into the mine with them, which lay one kilometre below the surface, and walked down what they called "a steep face". It was a narrow layer of coal about 70 cm wide—a mere slit in solid rock going down steeply, an area into which one could hardly squeeze oneself. Only thin props resisted the pressure of rock, the miners being squeezed between the two layers. It was very humid, dusty and hot down there, with the temperature reaching 30°C. It was hard to imagine that a miner could stay there six hours a day, operating a pneumatic pick.

After those meetings my idea of the present state of the working class changed somewhat. I could see that the workers were desperately trying to revive the traditions of an independent labour movement, and I became aware of their acute need for information, especially economic knowledge, and organized support. I think we must grant them this support—by "we" I mean intellectuals and People's Deputies.

The strike committees of the Donbass, Kuzbass and Vorkuta mines regularly send their representatives to Moscow, and we have established permanent working contacts with them: we help them arrange interviews with respective ministries and the USSR Council of Ministers. They have also participated in the drafting of various laws together with MPs, in particular, the laws on strikes, trade union rights and some others.

This means that even if the tradition of an independent labour movement is interrupted at a cerain stage, it can not for good. As far as I can see, perestroika is helping to restore the continuity, and this process can be very fast, even explosive. But, at the same time, I think that the working class should by no means regard strikes as a

universal means of resolving all its problems. The strike is an extreme, potentially dangerous measure that should only be used as a last resort.

It seems to me that the basic, universal way of settling conflicts should be through the workers' and their committees' direct contacts with the Soviets, both local ones and the Supreme Soviet. I think that those workers' leaders who emerged during the strikes should be nominated for and elected to the new Soviets, so that they have real power. This would represent a real breakthrough to power for the workers, their direct involvement in perestroika.

As for workers' committees and the alliances between them currently established, as well as the workers' determination to modernize their trade unions—I consider all these things good examples of independent political action. However, I have to say that the situation with the United Workers' Front and its regional branches is far more complicated.

There is no doubt that the workers' fronts springing up all over the country today unite many intelligent, conscientious and active workers who are sincerely concerned about the fate of perestroika, who have joined those fronts carried away by the rhetoric of their leaders.

I can even believe that some of their organizers are also sincerely concerned about the future of perestroika, but at the same time I can also see how the conservatives of the local bodies of authority, of the Party and trade union leadership are staking themselves on "the workers' card". It is perfectly obvious to me that the bankrupt functionaries are making a last-ditch effort to save themselves with a revival of dogmatic moods and rhetoric dating back to the times of the proletarian dictatorship. They are clinging to obscure bureaucratic regulations, and their own offices and privileges. They refuse to admit their bankruptcy, and make attempts to win the workers' support by gross flattery—by claiming that they are playing the exclusive role in perestroika, and by setting them against the intellectuals who support reform.

I am afraid that many of those who enthusiastically joined these fronts and shared their aspirations, and who so far have failed to see through the political games into which they have been drawn, will soon be in for bitter disappointments and tragedy, unless they succeed in turning their fronts into organs representing true working-

class interests. They must be made aware of the fact that they are treadding a very dangerous path, one which will give momentum to the "Red Wheel", as Alexander Solzhenitsin so aptly called it, which once rolled over our long-suffering country.

The point is that those who hate perestroika are counting on this very force. On of the main battles of perestroika is the struggle for the working class. This is where the interests of perestroika's supporters and enemies will clash, and we must be prepared for it.

CRISIS

We often speak about the various crises affecting Soviet society today (social, ethnic, etc.). In fact, there is only one crisis, deep and fundamental—I'd call it a supercrisis—from which all the rest stem. This is a general crisis of the Stalinist and Brezhnevite type of socialism, sometimes called barracks socialism. The system created over the decades of Stalin's and Brezhnev's rule is terminally ill, and its general crisis gives rise to many specific forms of the disease and numerous symptoms. The exacerbation of ethnic relations and the waves of strikes that have swept the country and occasionally burst out here and there fall into the same category.

Well, if the system is diseased and cannot function normally, if it is accumulating rather than resolving antagonisms then obviously it has to be treated. The question is how.

Actually, the faulty work of the system is affecting people in, for instance, Georgia, Abkhasia or Kuzbass, equally badly. But the Kuzbass miners define their precarious situation in terms used to describe social conflicts: "ourselves vs. the bureaucracy", "ourselves vs. the Ministry", "ourselves vs. the loafers at the local Soviets, who refuse to act", and, at the same time, "ourselves vs. the cooperative sharks". This is how they view the demarcation of social forces.

The very same antagonisms are described by some groupings in Abkhasia and Georgia in confrontational

terms, such as "ourselves vs. the Abkhasians" or, on the other side, "ourselves vs. the Georgians". While the Kuzbass miners think that the way to end the crisis and improve their own situation is to get rid of black-marketeers disguised as co-op members, bad ministers and loafers in the local bodies of authority, the small group of extremely active people in Abkhasia, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and other regions have an entirely different idea of what needs to be done: to kick out all members of other ethnic groups, and then enforce law and order on their own territories.

With some reservations, the latter formula can be applied to the events in the Baltic region as well. But the situation there is more complicated because Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia have a different type of culture, and their conflicts take a different shape. Thus in Georgia the conflict has not as yet taken the form of a constitutional and legal crisis. As for the Baltic region, we have already witnessed several crises like that. For instance, Estonia discussed and voted to have an electoral qualification based on one's term of residence, which set off a wave of strikes. That was bad enough, but at least there was no shooting. As for Azerbaijan and Armenia, Georgia and Abkhasia, the conflicts there take quite a different shape—that of uncontrollable rallies, violence, shooting and bloodshed.

That is why the reaction to all those manifestations of the general crisis of barracks socialism must be different depending on the particular case. Of course, we may try to treat the symptoms of ethnic conflicts separately from those of social discord, such as the ones expressed so acutely in the Kuzbass, Donbass and other mining areas. But we must always keep in mind that what in fact we are faced with is a supercrisis.

I will explain my idea by making an analogy that occurred to me during the election campaign. Imagine an almost hopelessly ill patient who has a neurological problem, that is, something impairing his control system. His coordination of movement fails rapidly, and he often has bad falls breaking his legs or arms, or smashing his nose. A team of medical specialists are trying to cure him. But instead of treating the neurological problem—the only cardinal solution—they limit themselves to putting his leg in a cast when he breaks it, the same with his arm when

he fractures that, or trying to stop the bleeding after he's smashed his nose.

If we apply this analogy to our social system, we begin to wonder how on earth we can ever hope to cure our almost hopelessly ill society.

The Soviet Union has a very acute housing problem; let's call that our broken leg. Suffice it to recall Khrushchev's epic project of building five-storey blocks of flats, which were quickly assembled from pre-fab panels in all parts of the country. It unquestionably represented a terrific breakthrough in the effort to solve the housing problem. Many flats were built, and numerous working-class families moved from their barracks into what seemed to many of them to be palaces. But was the problem resolved? No, it was not. We are as desperately short of housing today as ever.

Then there's the food problem—our fractured arm. Just look at the Food Programme that was launched in 1982 and was supposed to be completed in 1989. Our empty counters are vivid testimony of its failure. We are as short of foodstuffs as we used to be.

In 1983 a radical reform of the education system was begun—I'd compare it to the attempt to cure the smashed nose. But it sank into oblivion so fast that nobody can remember what it was all about. The funds were invested and spent, the officials in charge made a lot of fuss on all levels, but the problem of education is as acute as ever.

Let's take a more recent example, the problem of alcohol abuse. A radical enough attempt was made to cure this broken limb, too. The authorities tried to resolve the problem in one fell swoop: they closed down many liquor outlets, cut down vineyards, drastically reduced the production of hard liquor, and doubled prices. As a result, moonshining reached an enormous level, and the use of various substitutes, medicines and narcotics increased manyfold. Thus billions of roubles in revenue lost to the state went into the pockets of moonshiners and black-marketeers. But alcohol abuse did not drop. As long as we continue to try to treat separate symptoms of the disease and refuse to understand that we must eliminate the basic features of the Stalinist-Brezhnevite system we have inherited, I'm afraid we will be doomed to one crisis after another.

I have already written that our choice of measures

against this crisis is predetermined. The only way out for us is liberal-democratic modernization or, rather, a conscious deepening of this. Indeed, it sometimes happens that the only way to avoid an automobile accident is not to slam on the brakes, but, on the contrary, to press down hard on the gas.

I'm afraid that we are facing exactly the same option, or, to return to my medical analogy, the only way to recovery is to go through the crisis. If we continue to stuff the patient with drugs and artificially keep him on the verge of crisis, his body will grow weak, and he will soon die. Doesn't it make more sense to speed up the process and thus mobilize all the body's defences? I believe in the viability and potential of our society, and I am sure that it is capable of fighting its disease and emerging victorious from the critical situation, at first mobilizing its resources and then recovering completely.

CONGRESS OF PEOPLE'S DEPUTIES

Not only myself but also many other members of the Congress of People's Deputies thought that it was not up to the mark: it failed to meet both our own expectations and those of the rest of the population. Still, I cannot agree that the cause of democracy suffered a devastating defeat at the Congress.

It seems to me that the Congress could not be expected to make any important decisions—it was almost like a rally whose purpose was to discuss numerous problems. Unfortunately, nothing came out of the discussions either.

What the Congress failed to set up was a mechanism for comparing different points of view. Nor did it create an atmosphere of tolerance and mutual respect. Most deputies demonstrated an extremely low level of political culture. Unfortunately, most of them rejected outright many reasonable proposals without even making an attempt to consider and compare them in order to reach some sort of compromise.

There were very few situations at the Congress whose outcome was not predetermined. Among the exceptions

were when the deputies insisted on including Boris Yeltsin in the House of Nationalities of the Supreme Soviet, and when the deputies demanded that the election of the Constitution Supervisory Committee be postponed, which happened shortly before the end of the Congress. Thank goodness for that, for it was proposed to elect this key parliamentary committee, which was to function for ten years and make the most important decisions on future legislation and all possible anti-democratic acts, within a period of time only 30 minutes long!

I have often been asked why I stayed at the Congress to the very end, and whether I didn't think there were moments when the radical MPs were being trampled into the mud. Well, let's make it clear here that I had absolutely no intention of leaving the Congress under any circumstances. My 300,000 voters had sent me there and no matter how hopeless the situation might have seemed neither myself nor my allies ever thought of leaving the Palace of Congresses and thus withholding our votes.

There were a number of positive features as well. First off, that the Congress had taken place at all. Furthermore, all its sessions were broadcast live, and it was for the first time in the country's history that the Soviet people heard speeches, proposals and ideas which most of them had never even dreamed of, or at least had never thought they would hear them spoken of at such a venue. And there they were, voiced and discussed, and in the process changing the public's outlook irreversibly.

That was why it was so important to use that occasion and maintain one's presence of mind even when the most sensible proposals were voted down. I am sure that the ideas rejected today will be considered and, maybe, even accepted tomorrow, provided the following two conditions are observed: the elected participants of the Congress must continue to work just as actively, and those who elected them must not withdraw their support or grow passive and indifferent. In other words, all of us must join efforts to further the democratization, to promote and radicalize perestroika.

It is true that the Congress did not become a real parliament, but it could hardly have been expected to, for the simple reason that its structure and composition were not fit for it. It was conceived and conducted as a forum for discussion, enabling the deputies to speak up and

voice different opinions. Probably, that was what the architects of perestroika wanted it to be.

A body consisting of 2,250 members cannot make any responsible decisions in principle, especially if they require thorough preparations and detailed discussion. It is, indeed, more like a debating club made up of representative members.

If I were to put myself into the place of those who organized it, I imagine I would also find it essential to have different forces represented at the Congress, though not necessarily proportionally, according to the place they occupied in society, but according to a certain plan. Hence the idea of having direct representation from public organizations. Those deputies turned into a built-in brake slowing down the Congress "locomotive". Hence the many other filters and eliminators used during the election campaign, for instance, constituency election meetings—a very specific means of forming election boards.

Besides, perestroika is going faster in some parts of the country than others, and this certainly affected the results of the elections and, consequently, the representation of the deputies at the Congress. In some regions the democratization has had a deep social effect; the deputies from them are independent, liberal-minded people. In other places the old system of elections gained the upper hand, and no alternative candidates were nominated or elected.

The composition of the Congress is rather complex and I don't think it expresses the actual correlation of social interests and opinions. For instance, I think there are too many military men in the Congress. In no other parliament in the world can you see such a great number of uniformed MPs. The presence of servicemen in a legislative body is usually frowned upon in the world's parliamentary practice. The Army should be politically neutral, loyal to the Constitution, keen on its task to defend the country from any foreign aggression, and determined to abstain from direct interference in the country's domestic policy, except, perhaps, in those instances when servicemen's social interests need to be protected. But even then the state is quite capable of seeing to this without the military's direct involvement.

In the present situation we can say that the functions of legislative and executive power have been combined in

a very strange way. The Army is an executive structure, and I'm afraid that if it receives legislative rights it can turn into a self-servicing system.

The same is true about the representatives from the Ministry of the Interior and the KGB (State Security Committee), of which there are quite a few in the parliament. The question is whether people who are part of organizations having a rigid system of subordination can be efficient legislators. Their will is not free, so how can they enter the respective parliamentary bodies that supervise the activity of executive power? Imagine a Deputy Minister of Defence entering the Committee for Defence and State Security and supervising the activity of his own Minister! Actually, the responsibility for creating such an absurd situation and contemptuously ignoring the entire international experience of constitutional, legal and state construction falls on us, and I am sure that in the future we will have to correct all these mistakes.

Another typical feature of the Congress was the deputies' exaggerated concern that the purely representative aspect of their activity be maintained. Here are a few characteristic examples. Somebody asks the question why Kazakhstan is not represented on the Procuration Board, and several other speakers take the floor only to ask heatedly why Kazakhstan has been ignored in such an important body. The same happened when all other parliamentary boards were being appointed.

In the same way, many deputies tended to defend not only their territorial interests, but also those of their sex, social or age group. Why does this committee lack workers, that one—young people, and still another—women? Actually, the parliament's work should be based on a different principle and proceed from representation of every group of interests. Only the results of parliamentary activity can show us to what extent each group of interests has been represented.

FACTIONS

The problem of factions came close to being the bone of contention at the Congress. This notorious word, fac-

tion, caused an outburst of emotions. Having familiarized ourselves with the long-suppressed information about our country's real history, we know only too well to what appalling consequences the derogatory, fear-inspiring application of this label led in the recent past.

Though none of the deputies had ever belonged to any factions, their reaction to the word was spontaneous: obviously, political awareness is also part of our genetic code. As soon as someone uttered the fatal word—"faction"— some deputies' hearts sank and they broke out in a cold sweat, and others, carried away by a hunting instinct, could hardly suppress a war cry.

But since we want our new parliament to be a natural part of our life, something which has come to stay, we cannot avoid discussing the issue of factions. Here again, by the way, it's not a bad idea to begin by taking a look around.

Foreign parliaments emerged at different times and under different circumstances. Their history is rich with events. The only thing they have never had is unanimity, for as soon as there is unanimity, the parliament becomes a fiction, comedy or farce. The basic idea of a parliament has always been to give legislators a chance to voice real, opposing or even conflicting interests, compare them and reach a compromise to make laws.

We are in a more difficult situation. I have already written about our attitude towards other countries' experience: "Why should we take notice of their inventions?" Our politics are "historically" based on monolithic unity (this idea, by the way is also part of "the system's musical score"). Try to democratize something "historical", tested by long-term bureaucratic practice! So now we are allowed to say whatever we want, but to succeed, we will have to act together, in formation, so to speak. A step to the right or left will be regarded as a faction, with all ensuing consequences.

Still, the Congress (and society's life in general) revealed a whole range of views, from radical to conservative, showing that there are essential differences in the understanding of the principles and purposes of perestroika. A radical demarcation among the deputies with different views was inevitable, for it was absolutely impossible to reconcile the supporters of three positions.

The first of these can be defined by the following statement taken from life: "Go ahead with your reform,

we've seen it all before. We'll wait until you break your necks, and then establish iron order according to the people's will."

The second position is characterized by the intention of all kinds of "bosses", big and small, to make as many sacrifices as necessary on the altar of perestroika, but to keep their own positions at the top, survive as a social stratum and maintain their control over the situation. Another typical feature of the advocates of this position is their desire to come up with "the only correct course" and then to vigilantly protect it from any attacks from the left or the right. "We are perestroika!" they believe, "You talk, and we'll listen, discuss and decide."

The supporters of the third position are convinced of the necessity for radical thorough-going changes in our country, a steady course towards the demonopolization of the economy, politics and culture, the assertion of society's absolute control over the state, and the creation of solid legal guarantees protecting all civil rights.

By the end of the First Congress it was clear that most deputies adhered to one of these three positions. But had they divided along such lines, we would have seen the emergence of three minorities. Evidently, for various reasons the majority of deputies were not prepared for organizational self-determination within the framework of the Congress. Among the reasons preventing that was an innate servility of thought, which for many was more than just a second nature, and shrewd opportunism not wanting to do anything to hurt their chances to rise in the parliament's hierarchy. But for many deputies the reason had more to do with a sort of misguided commonsense, which prescribed traditional, reliable measures to be carried out gradually and with emphatic loyalty to the leaders of perestroika: "They might be right or wrong in this or that particular case, but perestroika is under way, and we should not really disturb them with a trifle like an agenda. This candidate for a ministerial post might have faults, but he is backed by a mighty important person who surely has thought twice before recommending him. If they can control perestroika, they are certainly capable of controlling this minister."

As a result, the faction that prevailed at the Congress was that of the "commonsensites", if you will, which played the part of a built-in brake. The thesis, "They, at the top, know better" dominated, and the occasional at-

tacks made by the radical deputies seemed out of place and even annoying, prompting such simplistic explanations as "ambitions," "self-advertising" and so on.

The main principle of "commonsensism", i.e., that "instead of all this talk about freedom we should be worrying about feeding the country," is hard to argue against. Only personal experience can convince the majority of deputies that without providing reliable freedoms we'll be able to feed the country only with another portion of promises, of which the nation has long since had its fill.

Once the issues of procedure and ministerial appointments were taken care of and the deputies got down to the adoption of legislative acts, the process of political self-determination among the "commonsensites" was bound to speed up. The demarcation of forces became more obvious.

Incidentally, the results of a poll carried out at the First Congress of People's Deputies by the Congress Group set up by the USSR Academy of Social Science under the CPSU Central Committee and accredited at the Congress, also bear this out: those results were regularly submitted to the deputies. According to the sociologists who analyzed them, in the atmosphere of pluralism the deputies felt an urge to consolidate their forces on the basis of similar positions and interests. The majority of those polled (81 per cent) thought that the formation of groups during and after the Congress to work out common platforms based on unanimous decisions was a legitimate course of action. Only 11 per cent found it unacceptable, while eight per cent said they had no opinion.

Furthermore, 63 per cent of the respondents backed the idea of working out official guarantees protecting the rights and interests of the minority. The "historical" ice has been broken, and lo and behold: life continues despite all the dogmatic incantations!

THE MUSCOVITES AND THE INTERREGIONAL GROUP

Those who closely followed the preparations for the Congress undoubtedly noticed the so-called Moscow

Deputy Group. The group first came into existence as the Moscow Deputy Club. Once it became clear that the newly elected deputies were not being encouraged to take an active part in the preparations for the Congress (it was instead being prepared somewhere in the depths of officialdom and in the corridors of power) many of us got worried. As the Congress drew nearer, we began to receive information that in other parts of the country, other constituent republics and regions far from Moscow, and even in Moscow Region, the local Party committees had gathered the new deputies together for what they called preparatory sessions. In other words, they briefed them on the situation, instructing them on how to behave, told them what the agenda of the Congress should be and what procedures used, and even described the contents of certain documents, which for some strange reason they were not allowed to see.

Naturally, we wanted, if not a leadership role, than at least to take part in that process and to influence it in every possible way. That was why we decided to set up the Moscow Deputy Club.

All those who were brought together by that idea (23 deputies from Moscow and two from Moscow Region) decided to hold our first meeting at the Intersectoral Eye Microsurgery Research-Production Complex headed by the renowned Professor Svyatoslav Fyodorov. That first, historic, meeting was marked by heated debates. When it came to making certain decisions, it turned out that we could not see eye to eye on quite a few issues.

In particular, we wrote our first letter to Mikhail Gorbachev that day, proposing that the Decree of April 8, 1989, be suspended. That Decree stipulated new legal norms of responsibility for state crimes. One of them was the notorious Clause 11-1, which envisaged punishment for what was termed the "discreditation" of officials, state and public organizations. That clause could be used against any person who criticized the actions of such people or organizations. Our opinions on that issue parted: the radicals thought that the whole Decree should be suspended, while the moderates insisted only on cancelling its most odious clause.*

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*Clause 11-1 was cancelled by the First Congress of People's Deputies in June 1989.

That meeting took place in late April 1989, when the preparations for the Congress were in full swing. We began to gather on a regular basis, then every day, working hard. As soon as our work began, we were invited to the Moscow City Soviet to meet with Lev Zaikov and Vitali Vorotnikov, full Politburo members, and Anatoli Lukyanov, an alternate member. Those meetings became regular, and we were familiarized with the proposals of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet pertaining to the programme of the Congress. Frankly, we did not like what we read.

According to the draft programme, the Congress was to be brief, its functions mainly being limited to those of an electoral college to elect the Supreme Soviet and its President, as well as making all those governmental appointments declared by the Soviet Constitution to be the Congress's prerogative. Two or three other, purely symbolic, actions were considered a possibility.

No serious discussion was planned. In addition, the draft agenda expressed the bureaucracy's classic idea of the deputies' role. At that point we plunged into a serious battle over all those issues.

We prepared a package of proposals for the Congress. Among other things, it contained some suggestions on the agenda, suggestions we considered normal, democratic and logical both from the political point of view and from that of commonsense. To begin with, we proposed that reports from the head of state should be heard on the situation in the country and the government's activity (speeches by Mikhail Gorbachev and Nikolai Ryzhkov), and that then there should be a debate, a serious discussion revealing the deputies' views. We considered the latter of the utmost importance, for we knew so little about one another, and such a discussion would bring out the similarity or differences in our approaches and thus make it easier for us to vote, which was the next stage. Our proposals would give real substance to the election of the President of the USSR Supreme Soviet, the appointment of the head of the cabinet and the election of the Supreme Soviet.

We included our suggestions in the temporary statutes of the Congress, which also envisaged the possibility of proposing and discussing amendments, and proposed a fairly democratic procedure for giving the floor to deputies

and stopping debate, doing a roll-call ballot and many other things which we considered essentially democratic.

We also suggested that the Congress consider the issue of ownership, particularly that of land, and the most urgent amendments of the Soviet Constitution linked with the democratization of our political system and the review of property relations.

As regards the famous Article 6 of the Constitution, which declares the leading role of the CPSU, there were different opinions: some believed it unnecessary to dwell upon it, while others thought it would be useful to at least discuss it. Our principal idea, however, was to declare the transfer of power in some form to the Soviets. Such an act would have to be politically confirmed.

Of course, none of us were naive enough to think that power could be granted by a legal act—it was perfectly obvious that power had far deeper roots and more solid material foundations. Still, such a symbolic act would be important for the development of the nation's political consciousness and in order to create a legal precedent to which we could always refer in our political struggle, using it as a lever. That was why we considered the passage of a respective resolution essential.

Our Deputy Club was open to any deputy, but it was mostly Muscovites who took part in it. The size of its membership fluctuated, swelling and shrinking. Sometimes there would be as many as 200 people. We would also have visitors from other parts of the country who had found out about our Club from brief press reviews or something on TV. Unfortunately, the Club's activity was practically never analysed or assessed by the media, which was also partly our own fault.

I feel that if the press had spotlighted and analysed our proposals before the Congress more thoroughly, even if critically, we could have either avoided many of the numerous socio-psychological conflicts at the Congress or witnessed much fewer of them.

I must add that the package of our proposals was printed in only about 400 copies. Another mistake on our part, as we should have printed many more. They were quickly distributed, but obviously there were not enough for all 2,250 deputies. However, many speakers also voiced our proposals, though in a piecemeal fashion. Still the most important ones were made public, even if we had

no chance to launch a broad discussion on them, a result of a lack of glasnost at the Congress itself.

The bulk of the Club's work was done by about 40 people. We succeeded in consolidating our efforts and reaching a sufficient level of mutual understanding. Of course, we did not make up a very close-knit team, but we were nonetheless able to appear at the Congress in a relatively organized fashion. Other deputies began calling us a Moscow group, and we defended our views more or less successfully. Our ideas were voiced from the podium and broadly supported by the public.

I would like to point out that many of our proposals that at first were formally rejected were later accepted by the Congress in essence. That is, at first they were voted down, but subsequently things would develop as we had originally predicted, though, naturally, with many unnecessary deviations and debates, not to mention time wasted and excessive emotionalism.

All that confirmed the correctness of our approach, even though we often found ourselves in the minority when making our most radical democratic proposals. Well, we never set ourselves the task of winning the majority's support—that would be unrealistic. It was quite obvious that the champions of the most resolute and radical changes were bound to be in the minority.

The spectre of a faction first appeared in the conference hall of the Kremlin Palace of Congresses on May 27, 1989. It all started with a speech by People's Deputy Yuri Afanasiev in which he divided the audience into a minority and an "obedient, aggressive majority". Then Gavriil Popov appealed to those present to think about setting up an independent Interregional Group of People's Deputies. Though the fatal word had not been uttered, many deputies instinctively understood what was going on and condemned the "criminal" attempt.

It was not at all easy to form the Interregional Group. The fact that the Congress achieved so little should be attributed not only to the harsh opposition of the majority and the cold-blooded, well-calculated management of the Congress, but, I'm sorry to say, also to our own inability to take joint political actions as a team.

The Interregional Group was made up of many "soloists", many stars with famous names and legions of fans, who were not used to playing in an orchestra. Even a hint

of subordination made them uncomfortable. Getting a group like that together, was something like forming a team of stars. Such a team could quite probably be defeated by a less brilliant one, one without stars, though better organized and more purposeful, for discipline and order count for more in this case.

We also faced another problem: we could not always find a common language with our natural allies who had similar views on things, for instance, with the deputies from the Baltic republics. I think a lot of this had to do with our lack of experience.

In my opinion, the setting-up of the Interregional Group was a vital prerequisite for normal political activity in our parliament, it was essential in order to influence legislative activity. You see, until recently any radical democratic proposals in this country were rejected out of hand at the very first hearing. Actually, the voting at the Congress and in the Supreme Soviet reminded me of a soccer match, with any initiative being viewed as an attempt to score a goal by the opposing side while the main task of the "home" team was to block those attempts by all means, to reject all proposals on the grounds that no matter what they could not contain anything worth considering. The obedient, aggressive majority was sure that the efficiency of its actions would be estimated by the number of times it effectively blocked a goal.

I feel sure that eventually we'll stop this game and begin to treat our parliament as an arena of reasonable compromise, i.e., what any normally functioning legislative assembly should be.

I set great store by the Interregional Group, for it will be able to balance the disposition of forces. The fact is that the activity of perestroika's architects, Gorbachev included, has been emphatically conservative. The compromises suggested by the CPSU leaders were clearly coming more from the Right. It's as if perestroika kept looking back over its right shoulder. One of its most powerful groupings was definitely conservative, and there was no united radical alternative to it—only isolated voices, which were easy to ignore. Now that we have an Interregional Group, these voices can no longer be disregarded.

Incidentally, the advent of the Interregional Group also helped create a better atmosphere for the leaders of

perestroika. They have more room for manoeuvre now, and compromises can be reached on a more pluralistic basis and comprise a wider range of ideas and proposals.

THE PHENOMENON OF GORBACHEV

I think it logical to begin my analysis of a figure like Gorbachev by comparing him with his predecessors. Lenin said, for instance, that "historical services are not judged by the contributions historical personalities *did not make* in respect of modern requirements, but by *the new contributions they did make* as compared with their predecessors."

As compared to his predecessors, Gorbachev was in a peculiar position. He is much less free to carry out his policy than Andropov or even Chernenko. Why? On the one hand, he was the flesh and blood of the existing system, its natural product. On the other hand, he, obviously, had become alienated enough from the system to be able to launch reform.

Therefore, one of his feet was outside the system, a very specific position which created certain advantages and disadvantages.

What were his advantages? He was not rejected as an alien body by the system, because he is its flesh and blood and one of his feet is still inside it. Meanwhile, his other foot is outside the system. Such a stance put him in a favourable position to start the reform. At the same time, however, it is holding him back from accomplishing it. Moreover, the further it develops, the harder it becomes for him to keep this stance, for he is pressurized from both sides, finding himself between a rock and a hard place. The forces protecting the status quo are pulling him in their direction, and the forces unleashed by the reform want to see him on their side, urge him to become the leader of their reform movement as soon as possible. Such is the objective situation in all its complexity, and it has to be admitted that the inconsistency of many of Gorbachev's actions stems from this very situation.

As I have said, Gorbachev had to make up for his lack

of personal power within a very short period. Andropov had great power, and Chernenko had ample authority as well, or, rather, his post presumed it. When Gorbachev was launching perestroika, he held the same post, but he was not used to that level of power. The pillars of the system, the monumental figures surrounding him, had greater experience and far more authority and useful connections than he did. I repeat, at the beginning he was acutely short of the personal power necessary to give momentum to perestroika.

This lack of power had to be made up for as soon as possible. In what way could it be done? Gorbachev actually had no choice but to promote glasnost. It was his trump card and I think he played it wonderfully, even if in the process he missed the chance to effect a modernization with authoritarian methods, which, I believe, would have done no harm to the cause of perestroika in its first three or four years.

If Gorbachev had had enough power from the very start and if we had sacrificed those years to an authoritarian modernization without glasnost, shutting up all the opponents of reform and tightening our belts; appealing to the people and explaining the necessity of sacrifices and hardships; making full use of the monopoly on the media, and turning to those groups of intellectuals who were prepared to support authoritarian modernization, perestroika today might have progressed much further than it has and been more radical. Our economic achievements would also obviously have been far more impressive. Incidentally, this scenario, which is in the tradition of Russian liberalism, would have enjoyed wide support. Furthermore, even the level of glasnost might be greater than it is now.

Glasnost could have waited another four years to begin. Of course, this is pure conjecture, though in my opinion not at all far-fetched. But of course it's moot, because Gorbachev did not have this chance; he was forced to embark on a different road, the only one opened to him.

He made full use of the opportunities presented by glasnost. Now this reserve has been exhausted. Moreover, glasnost has started working against Gorbachev, because it inevitably allows criticism against his miscalculations and mistakes. It becomes more difficult to put

the blame for what has been done on his predecessors literally with each passing day, which is why it can be assumed that his situation will be even more complicated in the future.

What is another feature of this phenomenon of Gorbachev? In the country's precarious situation of all-out crisis it is vital for a politician to calculate his every step, to moderate conflicts, to strike a balance between authoritarianism and democracy and to be able to find a common language with different, often opposing forces. All that requires very specific political and psychological skills. Gorbachev has these skills and is demonstrating a brilliant talent for manoeuvering.

I really became aware of this at the First Congress of People's Deputies and the first session of the USSR Supreme Soviet. I think every great politician has two qualities in common: an ability to grasp the situation and deep insight into human nature. Gorbachev knew exactly what to do in a continuously changing situation: he sensed a change instantly and always knew what role a particular person was playing. He could find an approach to everybody and influence his role to control the situation.

I deliberately watched him for some time, and tried to analyse his decisions on the spot. I did not know whether he had made a deliberate study of the theory of conflicts, or just had an innate understanding of them, but in some cases I almost felt like applauding his brilliant moves.

Take the debate on the appointment of General Dmitri Yazov as Minister of Defence, for instance. The candidate was sharply criticized, for the situation in the army was far from perfect, to put it mildly, and there were many reasons justifying very serious criticism. Yazov's unsatisfactory answers to a series of critical speeches even worsened the impression. It was obvious that the candidate was in for a shattering defeat, and Gorbachev realized this immediately.

The first thing he did was to announce a break. This was very important, for decisions made after breaks are usually different from those made before them. After that he took over and talked to the deputies for at least fifteen minutes.

At first he made no mention of Yazov—he spoke about his own situation in a confidential tone. He asked for advice, speaking off the cuff, and explained how compli-

cated the situation was, what efforts were being made to restructure society in general and the public attitude towards the armed forces in particular, and he dwelt upon the difficulties faced by the military. In the process he disclosed some of his plans, thus showing that he trusted the audience. This has never been discussed before, he said, but I would like you to see how things are.

What did the deputies see? They saw a man burdened with enormous responsibility, tired but making a terrific effort to drag society out of its crisis— a man who had to settle numerous conflicts with the help of inefficient assistants and supporters. But he had no choice, and he could not replace his team. As for the candidate to the post of Defence Minister, he had at least been tried in action, and proved capable.

Then he asked the audience to understand his position. And how can a deputy react to such an appeal from the President of the USSR Supreme Soviet and General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee? Can he say no? Of course not! This completely turned the tide in favour of Yazov.

I think that Gorbachev's approach to the problem was wonderful. He showed excellent abilities as a leader. The question is how he uses them. As long as they are used to benefit perestroika, that is, to curb emotions and reach reasonable compromises, I have no objections. But if he uses them to defend the interests of the system (which, incidentally, also happened during the Congress and in the Supreme Soviet), they then start playing a negative role.

Ronald Reagan was known during his presidency as the "great communicator". I think that this applies to Gorbachev even more. Reagan was a communicator as regards his ability to manipulate the media. Gorbachev isn't as strong in this area (his TV speeches are less impressive than Reagan's), but he is much more capable than Reagan as a communicator and politician able to unite opponents.

And one more thing. The current period is a decisive one for Gorbachev. Some radicals demand that he cease being a member of the "system" and become entirely a man of reform. Some even insist that he resign his post of General Secretary and remain only President of the Supreme Soviet.

I do not support such demands. I think it would be a

premature and damaging move, perhaps even a disastrous one. I think he must combine the two posts for a while longer, reconciling the two worlds—the old, dying one and the emerging one triggered into existence by the reform. No, they should be combined for a little while longer, as long as the crisis is still acute.

Once we've hit bottom and start to rise, that is, when today will be better than yesterday, and tomorrow better still, once perestroika is clearly working both as regards glasnost and the economic situation, then it will be the right moment to take this decisive step; I'm afraid it cannot be done earlier.

It seems to me that for the time being Gorbachev must go on playing his present role. But there is one major step I would also like to see him take: to recognize the new alternative that is now taking shape. Until recently, we heard of only one legal, conservative alternative to perestroika, and we heard about it every day, mostly at plenary sessions of the CPSU Central Committee, but sometimes in everyday life as well. The longer we live, the louder it sounds. Its slogan: "Bring back stagnation—we lived better under it!" This is no longer just the sentiment of the bureaucracy, but has also become the way a growing number of ordinary people feel. This is a dangerous symptom.

Under the circumstances it is essential to legalize the policy of radical reform. I don't understand why we should be against the consolidation of the radicals who are working towards the same goals as perestroika. All their efforts are aimed at furthering and speeding up the radical reforms.

As soon as this new alternative is legalized and included in the political process and activity of the Supreme Soviet as a normal, integral factor, the policy of perestroika will be stabilized, and Gorbachev will get powerful support for all his major initiatives.

THE SECOND CONGRESS

Before describing the distinctive features of the Second Congress of USSR People's Deputies, which took

place in December 1989, I would like to dwell for a moment on how the present circumstances have affected the very concept of the Congress. The first attempt to hold a Congress made many people realize that it could not possibly make any serious, complex legislative decisions requiring thorough consideration. It was conceived and carried out as a sort of nationwide forum allowing for the expression of the full spectrum of views currently existing in our society. This is what gave even the First Congress its great significance. It shocked the public and irreversibly changed its mentality.

To me, this was the main function of the Congress—to reform public mentality, influence it and step up openness by placing on its agenda the most urgent and burning issues that are being widely discussed at home, at work and in the street.

The Second Congress was the only chance to hold the public's attention by putting new problems on its agenda, problems which the majority of the nation consider vital. These are economic problems, and the issues of land and property ownership and forms of management. These things should have been the focus of the Second Congress.

The Interregional Group of Deputies proposed that they be put on the agenda, but we unfortunately were not listened to. We frequently are accused of trying to make things go too fast. Our opponents say we refuse to wait until a nationwide referendum can be held on a particular issue. But we did not mean to pass laws right at the Congress, which in any case was obviously impossible. What we wanted was a discussion of the concept and essence of such laws, and the Congress, where all points of view were represented, would have been the ideal venue for such a discussion.

But this is not what happened, and for the most part the Second Congress had the same failings as the first. Unfortunately, this hurt the idea of the Congress.

However, there were some accomplishments. A discussion of the government's programme was held. We debated the question of the country's economic revival and the stages of the economic reform. During it, it was suggested to give a vote of no-confidence to the government for the first time in this country's history (and I'm not only referring to the Soviet period).

It had happened before that some ministers received a vote of no-confidence, but never had such a resolution been put to a vote as regards the entire government. That's how far the Second Congress went. Though the proposal did not pass, the fact that it even happened was what was important. It was an indication of the deputies' desire to have a government that was accountable to the parliament, which, by the way, was one of the points of my election platform. I am very glad it has been put into practice. For the Interregional Group and many other deputies voted against the government's programme, insisting that it just be taken into consideration and nothing more.

I think this was of principal importance. Today the government has all the necessary powers to act independently, and the Council of Ministers requires no extra rights to implement its own programme. Insisting that the parliament give preliminary approval of its programme diminished the government's responsibility and placed part of it on the law-makers who, therefore, lost the possibility to exercise strict control over the government's actions.

Here, again, we encounter the principle of the division of powers, which, unfortunately, the majority of our present deputies have failed to grasp. I think, it stems from gaps in the deputies' parliamentary education and political culture.

Sometimes I'm asked if I thought the leaders of the Congress always showed a sufficient level of culture. What I can say is that the Congress was managed in what has already become a customarily harsh manner. But I must add that, while this style of management ran counter to the traditional image of, say, a parliament speaker, a close look at one's colleagues made one begin to understand that that was the only manner in which the Congress could be managed.

The 2,250 deputies were like a turbulent sea, chaotic and spontaneous, with conflicts and clashes bursting out here and there, people forcing their way to the podium, endless deviations from the subject, and attempts to raise local issues and dwell on the points which the speaker considered vital, and on which he had not managed to express his opinion during the actual discussion. Obviously, keeping this chaos under control required firmness on

the part of the chairman. The most important thing under the circumstances was a sense of proportion and to what end such firmness was being used. Was it really used to keep the debates under control or have them go a certain way? There is a very subtle borderline between the two, and it should by no means be violated. That is why the chairman has no right to sum up, or comment on the deputies' speeches.

But we violated all the canons of parliamentarism, especially at the Second Congress. Everything that could be violated was violated. We even voted to include in the Congress Statutes a point permitting the President of the Supreme Soviet and the Chairman of the Council of Ministers to take the floor any time—the majority of the deputies voted for that.

Other incidents that took place during the Congress were mainly linked with the discussion of the activity of its committees. One of them was triggered by the investigation of the events that took place in Tbilisi on April 9, 1989. I was a member of that committee, and I must say that it worked thoroughly and conscientiously, examining an enormous amount of material. We went to Tbilisi and returned to Moscow to sum up the data. We met with everyone who had anything to do with the events, both the soldiers and the victims. We also interviewed Georgia's former and present Party leaders; Politburo members, including Gorbachev, Lukyanov, Razumovsky, Ligachev, Chebrikov (who was still a Politburo member at the time); and, finally, two ministers, Bakatin (Internal Affairs) and Yazov (Defence).

That was hard work indeed. We collected an enormous amount of information, including some classified documents presented by the Ministry of Defence, KGB and Party bodies. All that made it possible to draw certain conclusions which we conveyed in our final report to the Congress.

I must emphasize that the committee was made up of scientists (biologists, psychologists, physicians, lawyers), representatives of the KGB, the clergy and the military (two generals). Naturally, the final report represents a whole range of opinions. It was written after many heated debates, yet in the end was signed by all the members of the committee without exception. No one voiced his specific opinion, and it seems to me that the report was well

balanced and careful, but at the same time precise and objective.

It would be futile to look for any attempt to discredit the military in the document. The committee deliberately pointed out that the event in question and its appraisal could by no means be interpreted in any broader sense, or used to discredit the Soviet Armed Forces.

Yet some military men, disappointed by the results and obviously misinterpreting their professional interests and the concept of the Army's honour, interrupted the debate by denying even the possibility of servicemen having in any way acted wrongly in that incident. They denied it outright!

Actually, they made some incredible statements. According to them, the Georgians in the square crushed one another, trampled upon their own women and inflicted horrible wounds to themselves by bashing their heads against the sapper spades which the soldiers had not managed to put away fast enough. . .

That was how they described the incident. The atmosphere around this issue was tense at the Congress even before the committee delivered its report, because some people had been passing out anonymous leaflets printed in several colours on good paper. The leaflets contained impolite (to put it mildly) references to Georgia, the Georgians, and the entire Tbilisi tragedy, and groundless accusations not only against its participants but also against the republic's present leaders and the Georgian people in general. These leaflets were being openly distributed at the Congress.

The atmosphere became so heated that it enabled the supporters of the version described in the leaflets to insist that the floor be given not only to our committee, but to the Military Procurator as well, which was absurd from the legal point of view. The investigation had not been completed at the time, and the Procurator's Office was to carry out dozens of new investigations (whose results are still unknown). Nevertheless, the Procurator submitted to the Congress some anonymous testimony. The Congress never learned the names of the witnesses, yet their evidence was used to back a certain version. All this took place at the Congress and was voiced from its platform—something which was totally impermissible! Naturally, it

could not help but cause an acute crisis in the debates on our committee's report.

The deputies were very upset. The Georgian delegation walked out in protest, followed by all the members of the Interregional Group, the delegations of the Baltic republics and many other deputies. The uproar, whistles and the noise from people stamping their feet completely disrupted the proceedings. All the speeches made after that by representatives of both sides were overemotional. Fortunately, the deputies soon came to their senses and calmed down.

I consider it a great achievement that the resolution summing up the committee's work reads: "The Congress condemns the use of violence against demonstrators." This is extremely important—as important as the fact that the resolution was passed despite the indignation and protests from certain overzealous and obviously biased representatives of the Armed Forces.

As is well known, the late Academician Andrei Sakharov was strongly against all violence. His death deeply affected not only the Congress itself but also the development of the political situation in the country. Our loss is irreparable: Sakharov was a living symbol not only for the Interregional Group but also for several generations of Soviet people. He was a man who stuck to his moral principles in the face of all opposition. He rejected political demagogy and was constantly reminding us of the eternal and humane.

We have lost a very great expert and authority, but we know how important it is to preserve and try to carry out Andrei Sakharov's behests. Shortly before he died he drew up quite a number of projects and proposals concerning the future of the Interregional Group and our Soviet parliamentarism. He also compiled his own draft Constitution for the country, and a number of other important political documents. I am convinced that we must turn his heritage to good account. Academician Sakharov's prestige is an incentive for us in our future work.

* * *

As a historian, I find everything going on now extremely interesting. I enjoy very much being involved, being a

participant in such important events. I consider myself fortunate to be in the thick of public life. Many historians of the past would envy me, I know. Sometimes it even seems to me that I can actually hear the wheels of history turning. As the Russian historian Timofei Granovsky put it, to observe society at its turning point enables one to see the mysterious machine of history in motion.

PERESTROIKA
Through the Eyes of a People's Deputy

Sergei STANKEVICH

I am Ukrainian by nationality and was born in Moscow Region in 1954. My father was in the military. I finished high school in 1971, and graduated from Moscow's Lenin Teachers Training Institute in 1977. At present, I'm a senior researcher at the Institute of World History of the USSR Academy of Sciences. I have studied the work of foreign parliaments, especially the US Congress, for over ten years. The results of my research work have been summed up in some 20 papers, a book on US political history, and a thesis on the same subject for my Candidate of Sciences degree, which I received in 1984. In 1987 I joined the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and in 1989 was elected a USSR People's Deputy.

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